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In Search of Lost Weather: Temporal Reflexivity and Ecological Awareness in Participatory Performance

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Introduction

1 It started as a playful act of sabotage. My task, along with fifteen other doctoral students, was to look for traces of time in the mountains and, as we explored our location at Col du Lautaret in the French Alps, we happened upon a geological device implanted in the ground to measure vibrations. Thinking of the future scientists who would study these vibrations, we decided to create a momentary blip in their data by stomping on the ground, whipping up a storm of movement to fool them into thinking that on one day in the early summer of 2019, the world had been shaken by earthquakes or inclement weather. After our minor sabotage was complete, one participant, a student of linguistics, pointed out that in French, *le temps* means both time and weather and, in looking for traces of time in the mountains, I turned to the atmospheric conditions. A cloud was passing by a far-off mountain top. When the peak was visible to me, it was present to me in space and time. When the cloud covered it, though, it only existed as a memory or future anticipation. The case was clear: the relational constellation of body, sun, mountain and cloud which made up my experience of weather was also what gave me access to a sense of time. In other words, time is like weather.

2 On further investigation of temporality and atmospheres, it became clear that my revelation that time is like weather was not a new idea. Michel Serres highlights the double meaning of *le temps* to argue that human beings are ignorant of the relation between time and weather because we are so "immersed in the brief reign of our power" (Serres, 1992, p. 5). Carl Lavery also points out a linguistic coincidence of time and weather in Greek, which both find expression in the word *Kairos* (Lavery, 2018a). Whereas Serres laments a temporal focus on "the instant that is passing" (Serres, 1992, p. 4), however, *Kairos* can be understood as the *present moment* and Lavery is keen to promote "presentness" in performance (Lavery, 2018b). In light of these conflicting views on time, this article offers a critique of temporal immediacy and proposes that temporal reflexivity in participatory performance practices can enhance participants' ecological awareness by developing their relational understanding of the atmospheric constellations they are part of. In making this argument, I draw on Baruch Spinoza's theory of affects which asserts that human volition, which can be understood as the capacity to take voluntary and intentional action, is restricted by a temporal perspective that is limited to the present moment. By contrast, Spinoza suggests that temporally varied imagination that combines considerations of past, present and future enables human beings to be affected in a great many ways which, in turn, enhances their capacity to take volitional action (Spinoza, 1677, 1992).

3 The theoretical propositions of this article are developed through discussion of two participatory performance works designed for outdoor community spaces: *Ridge Walk*, which I created with residents of the Peartree Bridge estate in Milton Keynes in the summer of 2018, and *Passage*, which I created in the early autumn of 2017 with the volunteers of Trumpington Community Orchard near Cambridge. The specific form of creative practice used in these projects was live action role-play, or larp, as it is commonly referred to. Larp has evolved from fantasy role-play games, with Nordic larp emerging as a specific sub-genre in the role-play cultures of the Nordic countries (Montola & Stenros, 2010). Nordic style larp is fundamentally co-creative, combining a framework offered by designers with the creativity of participants who play the work into actuality (Stenros, 2010). As such, larp can be understood as an "ecological" form of performance in which players relationally construct the fabric of play as a "meshwork" that is emergent, rather than prescribed by the designer (Ingold, cited in Lampo, 2016). Both projects discussed in this article are characterised by the co-creative approach of larp. Consequently, rather than "staging atmospheres" in the manner of conventional theatrical presentations (Böhme, 2013), the works produced functioned as designed frameworks that provided the conditions for new atmospheres to be co-created by the participants themselves.

4 While early manifestos of Nordic larp valorised the creation of fully immersive play environments (Pohjola, 1999), more recent theorisations of larp have recognised reflexivity as a key aesthetic value, highlighting how the "meta-reflection" of players underlines distinctions between fiction and actuality (Levin, 2020), offering a form of "estrangement" that supports subjective meaning-making (Stenros, 2010). In keeping with the emphasis on reflexivity in larp practice, my accounts of *Ridge Walk* and *Passage* focus on the discursive reflections of players, gathered through audio-recorded interviews that immediately followed each play session. These reflections serve as stimuli for theoretical arguments questioning the immediacy of presence in performance and advocating an alternative aesthetics of temporal reflexivity. My

contention is that a reflexive perspective on time, combining considerations of past, present and future, enables human beings, whether they are engaged in play or other 'real world' activities, to gain heightened awareness of the relational composition of the atmospheres, or ecologies, of which they are part.

Making Time, Making Weather: Playing beyond the limitations of the present

5 The pursuit of temporal immediacy is strongly apparent in contemporary performance practices. David Wiles argues that "today's culture is preoccupied...by the pursuit of an indivisible now, detached from past and future time" (Wiles, 2014, p. 15). Similarly, Josephine Machon argues that immersive theatre disrupts chronological time in favour of immanent "becoming" in an "ongoing present" (Machon, 2013, p. 130), while Yaron Shyldkrot describes immersive theatre atmospheres as "creatures of the moment" that are sensed immediately by audiences (Shyldkrot, 2019, p. 147). Beyond theatrical settings, the pursuit of temporal immediacy is a key feature of immersive consumer experiences. Jean-Paul Thibaud describes how shopping malls carefully deploy atmospheric effects of lighting and air conditioning to "neutralise the perception of passing time and the existence of a city outside" (Thibaud, 2015, p. 43), resonating with Nigel Thrift's argument that, through an "intensified attention to the present", immersive tourism experiences, from museums to heritage sites and theme parks, have learned "how to produce spaces which can grip the senses" (Thrift, 2000, p. 49).

6 The potency of the present moment is a core focus of Spinoza's theory of affects. Spinoza asserts that the affects of the temporally immediate present have the strongest impact on the body, stating that "the image of a thing future or past...is...weaker than the image of a thing present, and consequently the emotion towards a thing future or past is...less intense than the emotion towards a thing present" (Spinoza, 1677, 1992, p. 150). He goes on to argue, however, that a limited temporal horizon is disabling to human volition, suggesting that "the desires by which we are most bound have regard only to present, not to future time" (*ibid*., p. 182). The notion of being "bound" by the affects of the present moment implies a negative view of perception that is held in the immediacy of now, and Spinoza makes this point clear by arguing that "it is not wonderful that desire which arises from the knowledge of good or bad, in so far as this has reference to the future, can be more easily restrained by the desire of things which are pleasant in the present" (*ibid*., p. 184). In contrast to the aesthetics of temporal immediacy, Spinoza's ideas on reason suggest that in order to take fully volitional action, human beings must be equally affected by imaginings of the future or past, rather than being solely bound by the affects of the present. He states that "in so far as the mind conceives a thing according to the dictate of reason, it will be equally affected whether the idea be of a thing present, past or future" (*ibid*., p. 183).

7 Following Spinoza's call for a multi-dimensional perspective on time, my project at Trumpington Community Orchard, which took place over a week-long residency in September 2017, sought to use role-play to bring contrasting temporalities into relation. The project was hosted by a small group of volunteers, all of whom were long-term residents of the area, who had created the orchard in 2006 following a long campaign to raise funds and obtain the necessary permissions to renovate the site. The village of Trumpington, which is located on the outskirts of Cambridge, is a mixture of

old and new. The housing estates that border the orchard were constructed in the 1950s, but during my residency the neighbourhood was rapidly changing, with thousands of new houses being built. This expansion was a cause of considerable unease, with one participant, Cerys,[1] suggesting that it threatened to damage the "cohesive community" of the village. Subsequently, this defensive attitude towards atmospheric change in the local area stimulated the creation of a two-player role-play about the meeting of strangers, called *Passage*. This piece was about the collision of the familiar and unfamiliar, with two fictional characters going on separate journeys through space and time (marked by the changing seasons) during which they would meet, decide (for whatever reason) to spend a winter together, then proceed on their journey together or go their separate ways.

8 Given that *Passage* aimed to explore an intersection of old and new, the preparation for the role-play invited players to excavate memories from their own past to provide stimuli for the creation of fictional characters. The process began with three questions: Where have you come from today? Where have you come from as an adult? Where have you come from since childhood? After sharing their responses to these questions, players made drawings of characters about to go on a journey, based on what they had heard from their play partner. Participants were then asked to imagine possible landscapes that characters might pass through and possible feelings that they might have in these new landscapes. The landscapes and feelings were written on cards that players drew randomly at certain points during play. In other words, they did not know in advance what type of (fictional) landscapes they would arrive in or the feelings they would encounter in these places. Their creative challenge was to receive these stimuli then project their imaginings onto the existing atmospheric conditions of the orchard.

9 The first playing of *Passage* featured Cerys and me. Cerys invented a character called Celia who left her husband in springtime and came to a new town with her two young children. Along the way, in the autumn, she met my character, a brooding young man called Jan, who had fled the war-torn context of his childhood. Celia subsequently helped Jan by feeding him blackberries (which were in plentiful supply in the orchard) and finding him a place of safety over the winter. In reflecting on the meeting of trajectories between Celia and Jan, Cerys commented on how this new relation changed Celia which, in turn, invited her to reflect on her own changeability:

> I didn't know what to do with you at first...I thought "he's quite difficult to deal with" and then suddenly I became much more – I became like – quite a together person and I realised I was quite together and had quite a lot to offer this rather – sort of troubled young man – which is kind of – not like how I feel in life so maybe that's something I need to take seriously... (Cerys, interviewed by Jamie Harper. Cambridge, 23 September 2017)

10 As this example indicates, the role-play challenged Cerys to respond to an encounter with the unfamiliar in the form of an unusual character. As a result of this new relationship, she seemed to develop new capacities, becoming "quite a together person" and I suggest that this was aided by a depth perspective on time. As I have noted previously, the role-play was founded on a consideration of time, beginning with three questions: Where have you come from today? Where have you come from as an adult? Where have you come from since childhood? The responses to these questions provided stimuli for players to invent fictional characters, but I argue that they also established a mindset of depth perspective on time, combining considerations of the past alongside imagined futures towards which the characters were travelling. In Cerys'

play experience, her character, Celia, established a busy life, driven by the need to provide for her young family. Towards the end of the role-play, however, she reached a new (randomly selected) location, a plateau, which offered Celia (and Cerys) time to construct a new imaginative landscape and think about what they wanted in their future lives:

> In the summer, I got the plateau (she holds up the randomly selected landscape card) and the desire to learn (she holds up the randomly selected feeling card) so then I thought – where is it – (she reads from Celia's journal) "I'm settled and happy, but now it's time to make my mark on the world" – this is really – my life at the moment – I feel like I'm on a bit of a plateau and I want more variety and inspiration. Most of my life has been about learning – like the pressure to learn more new things – more and more...but you know – I'm not gonna be here in twenty-five years – that's very – you get to my age – life speeds up at such a rate and every year goes – I mean god its nearly winter again – already. I've always had this big need to feel like I've done something...and when I was on the plateau – on the plateau is actually being stuck and taking the time to recognise my stuck-ness. So, it's like – recognising that I'm ready to act – but these are the things – the qualities I need when I act to be able to – to make a good end to life. And to enjoy it on the way. (Cerys, interviewed by Jamie Harper. Cambridge, 23 September 2017)

11 What is notable about this example, other than the personal nature of what Cerys had to say, was her emphasis on taking time, as a departure from the increasing speed of life, to reflect on past and future. Her thoughts on the past mention "pressure" to learn "more and more" and this sense of pressure was made manifest in her observation of the weather, noting that another winter was imminent. Alongside this consideration of immediate atmospheric change, however, her imaginative projection of a more long-term future was focused on acquiring "qualities" that would enable her to act meaningfully. Referring to Spinoza's theories, I suggest that Cerys' comments seem redolent of his assertion that the passivity of being bound by affects of the present can be overcome by giving equal consideration to imaginings of past and future. It was clear that Cerys' play experience made her think quite deeply about her future and it seemed that this was conducive to seeking out beneficial affects that would strengthen her capacity "to make a good end to life".

12 In addition to playing with different temporal perspectives, *Passage* invited players to construct their own atmospheres by projecting imaginary landscapes, like the plateau, onto the actual landscape of the orchard. This indicates that atmospheres cannot be considered solely as an interplay of elements which "radiate effects that are largely shared", irrespective of the subjective vantage point of those who receive them (Griffero, 2014a, p. 31). Rather, as Mikkel Bille and Kirsten Simonsen propose, "atmosphere is not only something humans *feel*, or that conditions perception, but it also simultaneously positions the felt space as something humans *do*" (Bille & Simonsen, 2019, p. 10). In other words, since atmosphere is a relational constellation of which humans are part, they do not just perceive the affective stimuli of the atmosphere, they are actively engaged in making it. It follows that if atmospheres are partly composed of the subjective perceptions of human actors, these atmospheres must necessarily be influenced by the memories and future anticipations that colour their subjectivities (Sørensen, 2015).

13 In *Passage*, subjective memory not only influenced Cerys' response to the atmosphere of the orchard, it also influenced her imaginative construction of the fictional atmospheres that her character passed through, and I suggest that the collision

between the fictional and actual atmospheres encouraged reflexive insight. The plateau that Cerys visualised during the summertime (within the fiction) was a place where her character, Celia, felt settled and happy. By contrast, her appraisal of the atmosphere of the orchard on a chilly afternoon in early autumn made her visualise the onset of winter and feel the pressure of limited time. By comparing these two atmospheres, I argue that Cerys became more aware of temporal change, which aroused reflexive consideration of how she might acquire the qualities needed to enjoy her future life. This emphasis on atmospheric collision has similarities with Böhme's proposition that atmospheres are experienced most strongly "through contrast, that is, when finding ourselves in atmospheres that clash with our own emotional state, or when entering into them by moving from one atmosphere to another" (Böhme, 2017, p. 168). Similarly, Derek McCormack argues that the methods used to investigate atmospheres should focus on "how we make more of the worlds in which we move available for thinking – how we draw difference out, how we make it palpable" (McCormack, 2015, p. 94). Following McCormack's proposition, I suggest that, in contrast with the seamless spatiality of immersive aesthetics (Mühlhoff & Schütz, 2019), a non-immersive approach to participatory performance that invites a clash between actual space and landscapes of the imagination can function as a form of defamiliarization that heightens reflexive awareness of atmospheric change.

14 Having explored a depth perspective on time and defamiliarized perspectives on space in the Trumpington residency, my project at the Peartree Bridge estate in Milton Keynes, which took place over the summer of 2018, extended my investigations of how an aesthetics of reflexivity in play might enable players to shift beyond habitually embedded attitudes towards their lived environments. The project was a commission from Arts for Health, Milton Keynes, an organisation focused on providing participatory art opportunities in Milton Keynes Hospital and its surrounding areas. The brief for the project suggested that Peartree Bridge is a very isolated community and I found this description to be accurate, stimulating my interest in making play activities that might enable participants to expand their relational awareness of people and places in their locality. The level of uptake for my workshops was extremely low, however, limited to a handful of (mostly older) residents. One participant explained the low engagement by commenting, in written correspondence with me, that "a deep sense of apathy resides in PTB and it's difficult to break people out of their routine" (Laura, "Re: Walking Project in Peartree Bridge", email to Jamie Harper, 3 October 2018). Although the project was indeed permeated by an atmosphere of apathy, this throws into relief the value of instances when play did enable participants to overcome apathetic indifference and the familiarity of routine.

15 In one of the early sessions, I ran an exercise called *Platform*, which invited players to think beyond their familiar perspectives on the neighbourhood (which were overwhelmingly negative) by constructing a fantasy landscape. This involved asking participants, one by one, to place objects (a collection of random play materials) onto a large blanket to compose features of a fictional environment, then invent characters and narrate a sequence of actions, using the relational constellation of objects as an imaginative stimulus. One participant, James, began his contribution by selecting a brick which was lying around in the park space in which we were playing. He described it as a power station because the colour tone of the brick was similar to the visual texture of the iconic Battersea Power Station. In reflecting on his role in the story-making, however, he expressed frustration at his choices, suggesting that his inability

to think beyond the immediate familiarity of the object's literal function had limited his power of imagination:

> I wasn't very creative...I think I'm just feeling a bit dull today, I suppose. Couldn't see much further than the next moment or two. So, ah – suffering from a lack of imagination, I think...Maybe being stuck in the house all day looking at the screen – maybe that's what's sort of – dulled me...I've been very literal. Not very creative. (James, interviewed by Jamie Harper. Milton Keynes, 20 June 2018)

16 In reflecting on James' comments, the salient point that occurred to me was his feeling that he "couldn't see much further than the next moment or two" and, as the workshops progressed, I designed activities that explored how a depth perspective on time, oscillating between imaginings of past and future, might enable participants to think beyond the familiar and reassess their habitual attitudes towards the atmospheric conditions of the local environment.

17 The residency concluded with a two-player role-play called *Ridge Walk*. This piece invited players to walk through the neighbourhood together and reimagine it as an alternative society called Ridge, which was divided into two culturally isolated areas: East and West Ridge. As they walked, players followed written instructions prompting them to respond to their surroundings, imagining the fictional history of their region and making future projections of how the two communities would evolve. James played *Ridge Walk* with a woman called Lottie who noted, at the start of the play session, that although they had both lived in the same small neighbourhood for over twenty-five years, they were strangers. Despite their initial hesitancy in playing together, they created a complex story of two societies recovering from war. James created a female character who had been a victim of violence and Lottie described his story contributions as "quite mythical – almost fantastical" (Lottie, interviewed by Jamie Harper. Milton Keynes, 30 August 2018). In contrast with the dark atmosphere that he constructed within the fiction, however, James commented that the slow pace of the activity enabled him to recognise some positive features of the landscape that he would normally overlook:

> James: I noticed aspects of the area that I hadn't grasped before – because I don't walk around with my eyes open, I suppose...looking in the evening when its quiet like this – it has made me think that parts of this – territory – are quite attractive.
> JH: What did you find yourself being drawn to?
> James: Mainly the trees. During the daytime, if you work and commute as most people do here – you don't pay much attention to the actual surroundings. It's a very still evening, very quiet – and looking around I've appreciated the actual shapes of the trees more than I normally would – dashing around during the day... you can see the sort of – sculptural forms of things rather than everything being in motion like it is in the day when you're rushing around. (James, interviewed by Jamie Harper. Milton Keynes, 30 August 2018)

18 The key point that emerges here is that the slowness and stillness of the activity invited James to expand his perceptual horizon beyond the immediacy of everyday activity and notice things that would ordinarily be disregarded. It might be argued that James' pleasure was a result of the pleasant atmospheric conditions of a calm evening in late August, but I argue that the reflexive temporality of the role-play encouraged players to create a *belle temps* for themselves by expanding their relational awareness of pleasurable aspects of the local ecology.

19 The intentional cultivation of slowness and stillness that James enacted during the *Ridge Walk* is redolent of Lauren Berlant's notion of a "stretched out now" which she

describes as an "intensified present with senses of the recent past and near future" (Berlant, 2008, p. 5). This vision of the present indicates that experiences of temporal immediacy should not be considered to be homogeneous, a point that is affirmed by Rebecca Coleman's discussion of the multiple forms of presence in contemporary media culture, from the slack present of binge-watching Netflix to the high tempo present of Twitter (Coleman, 2018). Nonetheless, Berlant's account of the "intensified present" is notable for its emphasis on a reflexive deceleration that offers scope "to think and adjust, to slow things down and gather things up, to find things out and to wonder and ponder" (Berlant, 2008, p. 5). In a similar vein, Teresa Brennan's ideas on affective "discernment", as articulated by Lauren Guilmette, suggest that immediate affects can be "refined" through "reflective and meditative analysis rooted in the comparisons of memory" (Brennan, cited in Guilmette, 2019, p. 598). In other words, a reflexive comparison of past and present, alongside future imaginings, can enable individuals, whether they are engaged in play or the activities of everyday life, to reshape the atmospheric affects that they receive. Consequently, by adopting a depth perspective on time, I suggest that they can make their own weather by purposefully reconfiguring the relational constellation of the atmospheric conditions that they play, or live, within.

Mapping Time, Mapping Weather: Abstract representation and ecological awareness

20 Accounts of atmospheres that emphasise the pre-reflexive, temporal immediacy of affective sensing tend to downplay the possibility, or desirability, of producing representational abstractions of atmospheric conditions. With regard to representation through language, Griffero argues that "the more deeply felt, and in a way known" an atmosphere is, "the less it is linguistically circumscribable" (Griffero, 2014b, p. 197) and he describes the experience of atmospheres in terms of the sublime, claiming that they create a "primitive", "creatural feeling" that enforces "affective submission" and prevents access to a "further critical level" (*ibid*., p. 196). The concept of the sublime is typically understood in physical terms, associated with the experience of majestic landscapes like colossal mountain tops (Biggin, 2017, p. 35). The temporal dimension of the sublime is made clearly apparent, however, in Lyotard's conception of it as a "temporal crisis" that prevents the individual from exercising the reflexive "self-temporalization" of "conscious experience" (Milne, 2020, p. 202). For Lyotard, as discussed by Milne, the sublime produces "a general susceptibility to the affect and to the stasis" brought about by this affect, which interrupts both time and the linking of utterances or phrases', resulting in "an unrepresentable presence" (*ibid*., p. 211).

21 The sublime effects of the immanent now can be clearly identified in immersive theatre practices. In discussing the work of the renowned immersive theatre company, Punchdrunk, Biggin argues that the endeavour to prevent a "distanced, critical response to something in favour of a more immediate, emotional, visceral reaction" can be understood in terms of the sublime, creating "a sensation that resists attempts to put it into words" leaving audience members "unable to articulate" their experience (Biggin, 2017, p. 35). In contrast with valorisations of sublime immediacy in accounts of immersive atmospheres (and the failure of representation that the sublime appears to produce), Sørensen notes that privileging immediate affective experience entails that

"atmospheres cannot be passed down through representations", posing "a fundamental challenge to the possibility of apprehending atmospheres located before memory and outside of subjective experience" (Sørensen, 2015, p. 64). This concern with retrieving atmospheres of the past through representation is shared by McCormack who affirms the necessity of using abstractions to render immediate experience communicable to others. He argues that "abstraction is the process by which simplification takes place, and abstractions are taken to be those representational forms through which this process is stabilised and through which its results circulate" (McCormack, 2012, p. 717). In other words, abstract representation is essential in enabling humans to form conscious understandings, not only of the atmospheres that they are part of, but also of atmospheric conditions of other spaces and times that lie beyond their own experiential horizons.

22 The importance of abstract representation in gaining awareness of atmospheric conditions is highlighted by Gregory Bateson's writings on ecology. Bateson's cautionary phrase "the map is not the territory" refers to the idea that human beings often conflate actual terrain with its mapped representation. This is not to say that Bateson is opposed to representation. On the contrary, his argument is that humans should maintain an awareness of the difference between the territory and the map (Harries-Jones, 1995). Bateson's thinking regarding "map-territory relations" is concretised in his studies of play-fighting monkeys at San Francisco zoo. He argues that in order for the monkeys to engage in playful activity that does not threaten injury, they must enact a "meta-communication" that alerts them to the fact that "this is play' rather than actual violence (Bateson, 1987, p. 185). Consequently, the "playful nip" is implicitly understood to be a representation that "maps" violence but stands distinct from the bite of actual hostility (*ibid*., p. 186). In other words, in entering their play fight, the monkeys draw a distinction between what is "real" and the representational "not real" space of play by meta-communicating to each other that a boundary, or frame, between map and territory has been drawn.

23 Conceptual framing that delineates actuality and representation is significant because it enables thinking at a level of abstraction that permits a movement beyond automatic responses to stimuli and promotes reflexive awareness of contingent possibility (Harries-Jones, 1995). Bateson usefully contrasts this reflexive perspective with instances of immersive immediacy that collapse map-territory distinctions. He describes the spectator in the cinema who experiences "the full intensity of subjective terror when a spear is flung at him out of the 3D screen' or a person dreaming who "falls headlong from some peak created in his own mind in the intensity of nightmare" (Bateson, 1987, p. 189) as examples of perception that cannot discriminate mapped representation from actual experience. Bateson subsequently notes that this "absence of metacommunicative framing...is characteristic of the waking communications of the schizophrenic" (*ibid*., p. 196). In Bateson's argument, the schizophrenic is unable to distinguish fantasy from actuality. Consequently, I suggest that the endeavour to create atmospheres of sublime immediacy in performance (which tend towards the dissolution of map-territory distinctions) would seem to prompt a regression in the perceptual capabilities of human beings, undermining their ability to represent, and volitionally reshape, the emerging atmospheres, or ecologies, of which they are part.

24 The practices of larp are conducive to reflexive awareness of map-territory relations because they emphasise a conceptual "magic circle" that frames the fictional space of

play from everyday life (Stenros, 2014). Maintaining an awareness of this is frame is crucial in giving players a sense of "alibi", permitting them to do things in play that depart from habitual behaviour (Deterding, 2018). In *Ridge Walk*, the value of the magic circle was apparent in Lottie's suggestion that, due to the fact that her meeting with James occurred in the context of a fictional play activity, they were able to discuss their attitudes about the area in ways that they would not normally feel able to, given that they were strangers:

> Playing a game as an adult is really quite difficult – it takes a real leap of faith – especially when you're talking to a stranger. But actually – it – you know – gave us a bit of insight and made us use words about the area that we wouldn't have said if we hadn't done it through a story...I think both of us have sort of – negative views on things – that we kind of played out through the story. They weren't sort of like – constantly berating the area – but they were kind of – like very dark and the story kind of evolved that way...in my story the landscape started off quite barren and then grew and matured as the character did – but then was broken, but not beyond repair – it was then evolving again, kind of like a continuous cycle which is how I think the community is. (Lottie, interviewed by Jamie Harper. Milton Keynes, 30 August 2018)

25 What this example suggests is that the fictional nature of the play between Lottie and James enabled them to freely apply their negative views of the local territory to the construction, or mapping, of an imaginary landscape. The frame of play implicitly gave Lottie permission to express a "dark" perspective, but I propose that her reflexive comparison of fiction and actuality also enabled her to recognise that the real terrain of Peartree Bridge, like the war-torn landscape within the story, was "not beyond repair".

26 The mapping of the fictional landscape in *Ridge Walk* was conducted through short periods of drawing and writing which punctuated the discursive role-play as the players walked through the neighbourhood. In her discussions of mapping space, Doreen Massey warns against such representations, suggesting that abstract representation fundamentally undermines the dynamism of space by freezing time in a snapshot that falsely claims to objective, and she reiterates Bateson's warning that "the map is not the territory" (Massey, 2005). In contrast with Massey's aversion to mapping, however, McCormack argues that abstractions, like diagrams, "provide ways of foregrounding those aspects of experience that are not given in the immediacy of actuality...abstraction as a process is provisional and prospective, intended to open up potential space-times rather than close them down" (McCormack, 2012, p. 724). In other words, rather than viewing representation as something that freezes time and suspends the dynamic emergence of space, abstractions like mapping, diagrams or written language can "open up" time and space, shifting perception and thought beyond the concrete limitations of the immediate spatio-temporal present to visualise contingent possibilities.

27 The "opening up" that McCormack describes can be observed in Lottie's considerations of temporal change following the *Ridge Walk*. Having charted atmospheric change in the landscape of the role-play, she began to speculate on the likely differences between her view of the neighbourhood, as a long-term resident, and those of younger generations:

> I have a picture that'd probably be very different to the children here because they'd be really new to it. So they wouldn't know that there were houses behind those houses when we moved here...it would be good to get some children to play

> this actually...I just think they would have a really different perspective on it. (Lottie, interviewed by Jamie Harper. Milton Keynes, 30 August 2018)

28 This comment suggests that producing, and comparing, different mappings of the landscape through repetitions of the role-play with different players might offer revealing insights on atmospheric change over time, which indicates the value of moving beyond a valorisation of temporal immediacy in performance towards a depth perspective on time that values performative repetition.

29 In contrast with proponents of the pure immediacy of "presence" (Machon, 2013) or "presentness" (Lavery, 2018b) in performance, Richard Schechner's frequently cited description of performance as "restored behaviour" asserts that all performances are composed of repetitions (Schechner, 1985). Similarly, Rebecca Schneider suggests that performance must be viewed as a combination of action in the present with past performances that have contributed to that action (Schneider, 2011). Schneider describes the returns of past times in the present as "hauntings" (Schneider, 2015, p. 9) and similar language is applied by McCormack who uses the term "spectral" to describe the affective residue of the past in particular sites. He argues that the concept of the spectral "discloses the fact that the experience of space and place is always haunted by a non-coincident spatio-temporality in which past and future participate simultaneously and in unpredictable ways" (McCormack, 2010, p. 642). In other words, the atmosphere of a particular place at a particular time is necessarily permeated by other time-spaces, suggesting that the experience of atmospheric conditions cannot be reducible to the affective sensations of temporally immediate presence.

30 The spectral can be exemplified by returning to, or haunting, the French Alps, and revisiting the concept of sublime immediacy which is, as I have previously noted, often associated with contemplating awesome mountain tops. The story at the start of this article occurred during a summer school for doctoral students, hosted by University of Grenoble. After the school was finished, I took a short holiday in a nearby resort called Les Deux Alpes which I had visited on summer holiday as a teenager. During that trip, I had gone skiing on a sizeable glacier *piste*, but the 2019 summer skiing area was dramatically reduced in size, so I went hiking in the mountains on the opposite side of the valley, which offered a commanding view of the glacier. In looking at the breathtaking landscape, I wondered whether I might be experiencing the sublime...but when I saw the tiny speck on the top of the mountain which marked the terminus of the lift that transported skiers to the summit, my thoughts were not arrested by the majesty of the mountain's temporally immediate *presence*. Instead, by comparing the mountain as it was when I was younger with my experience of it on that blisteringly hot day, I became preoccupied by *absence*: of ice and a time that could not be recovered. I thought again of the linguistic coincidence of *le temps* and it seemed clear that I was in search of lost time and, concurrently, in search of lost weather. This result of this search was the interruption of sublime immediacy, which was replaced by a reflexive awareness of time, observed through changes in the alpine atmosphere.

31 In reflecting on my experience of time and weather in the mountains, I formed the idea that a depth perspective on time can be conducive to heightened ecological awareness that may strengthen the volitional capacity to purposefully shape the ecological systems of which we are part. Although atmospheric immersion may be an exhilarating and intoxicating experience (Grant, 2013), I argue that, in addition to limiting perception to the temporal instant, sublime immediacy can narrow spatial perception

to what is immediately proximal. For example, in discussing immersive tourism experiences, Amanda du Preez argues that in the overwhelming moment of the sublime "the mind is so filled with its object it can entertain no thoughts on any other subject; it is a moment of terrifying paralysis that temporarily suspends the activities of the mind" (Libby, cited in Du Preez, 2009, p. 205). This argument resonates with Spinoza's assertion that:

> An emotion is bad or harmful only in so far as the mind is prevented by it from thinking. And therefore that emotion by which the mind is determined for regarding many objects at the same time is less harmful than another equally great which detains the mind in the contemplation of one alone or fewer objects in such a manner that it cannot think of others. (Spinoza, 1677, 1992, p. 205)

32 Consequently, a sublime experience that "detains the mind in the contemplation of one alone or fewer objects" would seem to hinder the capacity for thought that is orientated towards the relational composition of ecological systems. The connection between temporal immediacy and the loss of relational awareness in space can be further exemplified by Fredric Jameson's critique of the end of temporality. Jameson describes Deleuze and Guattari's "ideal schizophrenic", as a "conceptual personage" who occupies an "absolute present" which offers "a new kind of freedom, a disentanglement from the shackles of the past...as well as from those of the future" (Jameson, 2003, p. 710). In much the same way that Bateson's account of the schizophrenic highlights the inability to distinguish actuality and representation, the fact that the "ideal schizophrenic", according to Jameson, is suspended in the territory of the "absolute present" means that they have no capacity to reflexively compare mental mappings of past and future with the actuality of the present. Despite the purported emancipation of temporal immediacy, Jameson argues that this disentanglement from past and future also entails disentanglement from relational connections, leaving nothing other than the solo, autonomous body:

> When you have nothing left but your temporal present, it follows that you also have nothing left but your own body. The reduction to the present can thus also be formulated in terms of the reduction to the body as a present of time. (Jameson, 2003, p. 712)

33 In other words, the "absolute present" of the immersive sublime not only expunges prior subjectivity and the powers of representation, it also creates a singularity of spatial focus that occludes awareness of a broader ecology by reducing experience to the spatio-temporal immediacy of bodily presence.

34 Departing from the spatio-temporal immediacy of immersive performance, the practical projects undertaken at Peartree Bridge and Trumpington Community Orchard both pursued an aesthetics of reflexivity that invited players to consciously delineate actual territory and the mapped representations they made of it through their fictional constructions. I suggest that the map-territory distinctions that players made, combined with a depth perspective on time, enhanced their awareness, even if only slightly, of valued relational connections within the atmospheres, or ecologies, that they were part of. For example, the *Ridge Walk* invited Lottie to combine her past and present experience of Peartree Bridge to create a relatively optimistic projection of how the neighbourhood might evolve in future, while the slow tempo of James' play departed from habitual "rushing around" and enabled him to partially overcome his negative outlook on the neighbourhood by observing the trees and recognising the pleasure that they gave him. Likewise, with regard to *Passage*, Cerys' reflections on her

play experience enabled her to step out of the quick tempo of daily activities to consider the future time of her life and visualise the "qualities" that might enable her to live it well. My own experience of playing *Passage* also prompted me to think in some depth about my past. Although I did not realise it during play, Cerys had based her character on a story I had told about my mother's arrival in a strange town with my older brother and sister when they were young children. Subsequently, when my character, Jan, was invited to spend the winter living next door to Celia's family, I imagined him getting to know the two youngsters. When it was time to leave, Jan gave the children a gift of balloons, which led to the rather moving thought, when the play was concluded, that I (as Jan) had played with my older brother and sister when they were children and offered them a gift which might have provided some small comfort during their early lives.

35 As these examples illustrate, a reflexive perspective on time can produce a heightened relational awareness of meaningful people, places and things within our horizons of experience. Essentially, I suggest that temporal reflexivity can function as a form of leverage that shifts perception beyond the limitations of the here and now, strengthening the capacity to compare imaginings of past and future to inform creative action in the present. This notion of reflexive temporal leverage is affirmed by Michelle Bastian's argument that:

> Time needs to be more clearly understood, not as a quantitative measurement, but as a powerful social tool for producing, managing and/or undermining various understandings of who or what is in relation with other things or beings. (Bastian, 2012, p. 25)

36 In other words, for Bastian, "telling time" is not simply a matter of reading the clock, it is a comparative action of assessing how relational constellations, like atmospheres or ecologies, might appear to change. She offers the examples of farmers using the sun to organise the time of their labour in the fields, fishermen whose sailing schedules are determined by the tides, or geologists who tell time by comparing rocks (*ibid*., p. 29). In a similar vein, my experience of time in the Alps compared the glaciers on two mountains: one that existed when I was a teenager and one that existed when I was a doctoral student. Using these mountains to tell time does not require numbering the years between my two visits, it involves comparison of their changing atmospheres and "remote sensing" (McCormack, 2010) of the weather that has been lost.

Conclusion

37 To conclude, I have argued in this article for a reflexive temporality in participatory performance that enhances relational understanding of the atmospheric conditions, or ecologies, of which we are part. Although many contemporary performance practices place a strong emphasis on the immediacy of presence, I have drawn on Spinoza's theories of affect to suggest that being solely driven by the affects of the present can render the human body passive and limit the capacity to undertake volitional action. This argument is compounded by my discussion of the sublime, which arrests perception in the here and now and undermines the capacity to produce representations of immediate experience. In contrast with the aesthetics of immersive immediacy, my explorations of temporal reflexivity in live action role-play suggest that a depth perspective on time can heighten players' awareness of valued relational connections within their horizons of experience. My discussions of *Passage* and *Ridge*

Walk indicate that by comparing the atmospheric conditions of their immediate surroundings with their fictional constructions, participants were able to reflexively reconfigure their perspectives on the past, present and potential futures of their local environments, and thereby make their own weather.

38 My focus on an aesthetics of reflexivity is supported by the ecological thinking of Gregory Bateson whose ideas on map-territory relations suggest that the development of ecological awareness depends on the ability to make distinctions between actuality and its representation. By foregrounding the value of representational abstraction, I argue that the methods of live action role-play can invite participants to move beyond simply experiencing atmospheres in the affective immediacy of the present towards purposefully shaping their emergent trajectories. Consequently, an aesthetics of reflexivity that encourages a depth perspective on time can heighten ecological awareness, both in play and in everyday life, of how atmospheric conditions are relationally composed, enhancing the potential to reconfigure the atmospheres of the future through volitional action in the present.

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NOTES

1. In order to maintain confidentiality, I use pseudonyms for all public participants mentioned in this article.

RÉSUMÉS

Cet article avance que la réflexivité temporelle lors d'exercices de performance participative peut renforcer l'agentivité des participants en les invitant à comparer des imaginaires passés et futurs pour nourrir une créativité tournée vers le présent. À l'inverse des formes contemporaines de performances immersives, qui valorisent l'immédiateté de la présence, nous soutenons que les atmosphères immersives concentrant la perception sur un *maintenant* immanent peuvent restreindre la volonté créative. Cette proposition est développée en référence à la théorie des affects de Spinoza selon laquelle se soumettre aux affects du présent peut rendre le corps humain passif. Une esthétique alternative de la réflexivité temporelle est présentée à travers l'analyse de projets de performance qui s'appuient sur des jeux de rôles et qui ont été conçues et développées par l'auteur entre 2017 et 2018. Les observations qui se dégagent de ces projets indiquent qu'une perspective approfondie sur une mise en perspective de la temporalité peut renforcer la sensibilité des participants aux liens relationnels qui existent au sein des conditions atmosphériques de leur jeu et étoffer leurs capacités créatives pour générer leurs propres atmosphères. La dernière partie de cet article s'appuie sur les théories de l'écologie de Gregory Bateson. Elles nous permettent de conclure que la réflexivité temporelle peut augmenter la sensibilité écologique et encourager les participant.e.s à engager des actions volontaires afin de former délibérément des atmosphères, ou des écologies, qui sont jouées et vécues de l'intérieur.

This article argues that temporal reflexivity in participatory performance practices can support the agency of participants by inviting them to compare past and future imaginings to inform creative action in the present. In contrast with contemporary forms of immersive performance which valorise the immediacy of presence, the article argues that immersive atmospheres that focus perception on the immanent moment of now can restrict creative volition. This proposition

is developed with reference to Spinoza's theory of affects which suggests that being driven by the affects of the present can render the human body passive. An alternative aesthetics of temporal reflexivity is presented through discussion of participatory performance projects using live action role-play drama that were designed and facilitated by the author during 2017-2018. Insights drawn from these projects suggest that a depth perspective on time can heighten participants' awareness of relational connections within the atmospheric conditions of their play and expand their creative capacities to make their own atmospheres. The latter part of the article draws on Gregory Bateson's theories of ecology to conclude that temporal reflexivity can enhance ecological awareness, enabling individuals to undertake volitional action to purposefully shape the atmospheres, or ecologies, that they play, and live, within.

INDEX

Keywords : participatory performance, immersion, immediacy, affect, reflexivity, play, ecology, the sublime
Mots-clés : performance participative, immersion, immédiateté, affect, réflexivité, jeu, écologie, le sublime

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